AVATAR

The Last Airbender

Show #113

BOOK ONE: WATER
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: The Blue Spirit

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AS BROADCAST DRAFT
June 2, 2005

ACT ONE

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

A dragon hawk flies over the ocean. A small, metal message holder is attached to its talon. Far in the distance, we see that it's headed for...

EXT. FIRE NATION STRONGHOLD - CONTINUOUS

A massive metal structure overlooks the ocean, perched above the Fire Nation's main supply line. The stronghold has a tall outer, middle, and inner wall and in the center keep stands a tower.

EXT. FIRE NATION STRONGHOLD - ARCHER'S FIELD - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: A target. FWAP! An arrow hits the bullseye.

Far on the other side of the field, a tattooed-faced archer lowers his bow. The next archer steps up, raises his bow, and pulls back his arrow...

FWAP! Commander Zhao stands on a balcony above, overlooking the archers' practice. Behind him stands COLONEL SHINU, a gruff army leader in the style of George Patton.

COLONEL SHINU
Absolutely not! The Yuyan Archers stay here. Your request is denied, Commander Zhao.

COMMANDER ZHAO
Colonel Shinu, please reconsider.

Commander Zhao gestures at the archers below.

COMMANDER ZHAO (CONT'D)
Their precision is legendary. The Yuyan can pin a fly to a tree from a hundred yards away -- without killing it. You're wasting their talents using them as mere security guards.

COLONEL SHINU
I can do whatever I want with their talents, they're my archers and what I say goes.

COMMANDER ZHAO
But my search for the Avatar is--

COLONEL SHINU
Is nothing but a vanity project. We're fighting a real war here and I need every man I've got. Commander.

COMMANDER ZHAO
But--

COLONEL SHINU
That's final, I don't want to hear another word about it!

CLOSE ON: Zhao. His eyes narrow in anger.

A hawk SCREECHES. Both men turn to see the messenger hawk flying towards them. Shinu holds out his arm. The hawk lands on it. Colonel Shinu removes a small scroll (that has a royal Fire Nation insignia) from the hawk's message holder and begins reading it.

COMMANDER ZHAO
(re: scroll)
News from Fire Lord Ozai?

Shinu's hand begins shaking and his eyes widen in disbelief. Zhao snatches the scroll out of Colonel Shinu's hands. As he reads, a smug smile spreads across Zhao's face.

COMMANDER ZHAO (CONT'D)
It appears I've been promoted to admiral. My request... is now an order.

Gritting his teeth, Shinu bows to Zhao. Shinu exits, and Zhao looks down at the archers. The camera PANS UP to the roof. Watching over the scene, in a shadowy overhang, crouches a black-cloaked figure who wears a haunting red, metal mask. This is the RED SPIRIT. He watches Zhao with particular interest. In a blur of movement, he jumps off the roof and is gone...

EXT. ABANDONED CITY RUINS - DAY

The sky is overcast. The camera PANS over the site of an Earth Kingdom city that was destroyed by the Fire Nation many years ago and has since been abandoned. (Burnt buildings and trees, crumbled rocks everywhere.)

SOKKA (O.S.)
(COUGHING)

The camera WHIP PANS over to Sokka, who is cuddled in Appa's furry arm. He is a delirious, sweaty, sick mess. Katara places a cold compress on his head.

KATARA
This should bring your fever down.

SOKKA
(delirious)
You know what I love about Appa the most? His sense of humor.

KATARA
That's nice, I'll tell him.

APPA
(BELLOWS)

SOKKA
(LAUGHS) Classic Appa.

Aang approaches, followed by Momo.

AANG
How's Sokka doing?

KATARA
Not so good. Being out in that storm really did a number on him.

AANG
I couldn't find any ginger root for the tea, but I found a map.

Aang unrolls an old, dirty scroll on the ground in front of Katara. It depicts the city and the surrounding area.

AANG (CONT'D)
There's an herbalist institute on the top of that mountain. We can probably find a cure for Sokka there.

KATARA
Aang, he's in no condition to travel. Sokka just needs more rest. I'm sure he'll be better by tomorrow-- (COUGHS)

AANG
(worried)
Not you too.

KATARA
Relax. It was just a little cough. I'm fi-- (COUGHING FIT)

She sounds awful. She holds a hand to her head and GROANS.

AANG
(panicked)
That's how Sokka started yesterday-- Now look at him! He thinks he's an Earthbender.

A delirious Sokka weakly punches the air.

SOKKA
Take that you rock.

AANG
(to Katara)
A few more hours and you'll be talking nonsense too. I'm going to find some medicine.

Aang tucks the map in his shirt and whips open his glider, ready to fly. Although it is not raining, the cloudy sky lights up with lightning strikes. Aang closes the glider and leaves his staff next to Appa.

AANG (CONT'D)
Uh... maybe it's safer if I go on foot.
(to Momo and Appa)
Keep an eye on them, guys.

Momo CHITTERS in response, and Appa BELLOWS.

SOKKA
(LAUGHING) You guys are killing me.

Aang looks back at his sick friends, then runs out of the ruins, faster than humanly possible. He heads towards a tall mountain in the distance.

INT. ZUKO'S SHIP - BRIDGE - DAY

Sunlight streams through the windows. Lieutenant Jee is going over a nautical map with Prince Zuko. Uncle Iroh plays Pai Sho with a few of the soldiers.

LIEUTENANT JEE
We haven't been able to pick up the Avatar's trail since the storm, but if we continue heading Northeast--

Suddenly, the room goes into shadow. Everyone looks up. Outside the window, Zuko sees the hull of a Fire Navy ship going by.

ZUKO
What do they want?

Uncle rubs his hands together excitedly.

UNCLE
(joking)
Perhaps a sporting game of Pai Sho?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OCEAN - MOMENTS LATER

A Fire Navy ship sits next to Zuko's ship, dwarfing it. A boarding plank connects the two.

INT. ZUKO'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

A Fire Navy Captain and two officers stand in the bridge. One of the officers holds up a 'wanted-poster' scroll. It has a calligraphic painting of the Avatar and some Chinese characters.

FIRE NAVY CAPTAIN
The hunt for the Avatar has been given prime importance. All information regarding the Avatar must be reported directly to Admiral Zhao.

Uncle chimes in without looking up from his Pai Sho game.

UNCLE
Zhao has been promoted? Well, good for him.

ZUKO
(seething)
I've got nothing to report to Zhao. Now get off my ship and let us pass.

FIRE NAVY CAPTAIN
Admiral Zhao is not allowing ships in or out of this area.

ZUKO
Off my ship!

The captain and his men exit the bridge.

UNCLE
Excellent! I take the pot!

Uncle happily collects his Pai Sho winnings from the other soldiers and adds it to his growing pile of coins. The soldiers look defeated.

UNCLE (CONT'D)
But you're all improving. I'm certain you will win if we play again.

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - DAY

In the trees, two Fire Nation soldiers sit in a camouflaged lookout post above a trail. One soldier surveys the trail through a telescope; the other reads the 'wanted' poster of Aang.

SOLDIER #1
Says here that the Avatar can create tornadoes and run faster than the wind. Pretty amazing.

SOLDIER #2
Ah, that's just a bunch of Fire Lord propaganda. There's no way that's true.

Through his telescope, Soldier #2 spots the Avatar, running faster than the wind (think Olympic sprinters.)

As Aang passes by, he kicks up tons of dust and blows the camouflage off the lookout post, (tornado style) leaving the two soldiers stunned. NOTE: Aang runs by so fast, he doesn't notice the soldiers.

The soldiers look at each other for a beat, and then the two men scramble to the ground and rush off in the other direction.

EXT. ABANDONED CITY RUINS - DAY

Sokka is still huddled in Appa’s arm.

SOKKA
(weakly)
Katara... please... water...

The camera PANS TO Katara, who is huddled in Appa’s other arm. She is in stage two of her sickness - weaker, feverish. She holds the cold compress to her own head. Katara holds out her waterskin to give it to Momo.

KATARA
Listen carefully, Momo. I need you to take this to the river and fill it with water.

ON MOMO’S POV: (This should look like a fish-eye lens.) As Katara speaks, she makes various gestures indicating water, running, etc.

KATARA (CONT’D)
(WEIRD HUMAN CHITTERING)

BACK TO KATARA

KATARA (CONT’D)
Got it?

Momo CHITTERS in response and runs off.

EXT. HERBALIST INSTITUTE - DAY

WIDE ON: The institute - the structure sits high on a cliff, surrounded by all kinds of natural growth. Aang runs up the path and into the entrance.

INT. HERBALIST INSTITUTE - GREENHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Aang follows the cat into the greenhouse area, an open-air room covered by vines and ivy that houses an endless variety of plant life. An 80-year-old woman (the HERBALIST) picks some herbs off a plant. Her movements are very slow and labored.

CAT
(MEOW)

AANG
(out of breath, calling)
Hello? I'm sorry to barge in like this, but I need some medicine for my friends. They have fevers and they've been coughing and--

HERBALIST
(interrupting)
Settle down, young man. Your friends are going to be fine.

The herbalist slowly puts various herbs and liquids into a bowl and mashes it up with a pestle.

HERBALIST (CONT'D)
I've been up here for over forty years, you know. Used to be others. But they all left years ago. Now it's just me and Miyuki.

The cat MEOWS.

AANG
(trying to be polite)
That's nice.

HERBALIST
Wounded Earth Kingdom troops still come by now and again. Brave boys. And thanks to my remedies, they always leave in better shape then when they arrive.

AANG
That's nice.
(trying to hurry her)
Are you almost done?

HERBALIST
Hold on. I just need to add one last ingredient.

The herbalist slowly shuffles down the row of numerous and dense plants, plucking various leaves, taking her sweet old time.

HERBALIST (CONT'D)
Sandalwood... oh lets - no, that won't do. Banana leaf... nope. Ginger root... uh-uh. Oh, where is that pesky little plant?

Aang looks impatient. This is going to take forever.

EXT. ZUKO'S SHIP - SUNSET

Prince Zuko runs through a solo Firebending sequence, kicking and punching with frustrated intensity. Zuko's crew stands off to the side.

Uncle approaches as Zuko finishes his set.

UNCLE
Is everything okay? It's been almost an hour and you haven't given the men an order.

ZUKO
I don't care what they do.

UNCLE
Don't give up hope yet. You can still find the Avatar before Zhao.

ZUKO
How, Uncle? With Zhao's resources it's just a matter of time before he captures the Avatar.
(turning away)
My honor, my throne, my country... I'm about to lose them all.

Uncle steps forward, about to argue, but stops himself. There's nothing he can say.

INT. HERBALIST INSTITUTE - GREENHOUSE - SUNSET

The herbalist is still picking through her plants.

HERBALIST
Ah! Here's what I was looking for... plum blossom.

AANG
(sotto)
Finally.

The herbalist plucks the plum blossom and puts it in the mixture. Aang reaches for it.

AANG (CONT'D)
Thanks for all your help!

The herbalist swats Aang’s hands away.

HERBALIST
Hands off! What do you think you’re doing?

AANG
Taking this cure to my friends.

HERBALIST
(LAUGHS) This isn’t a cure. It’s Miyuki’s dinner.

The herbalist slides the bowl over to Bo-shi, who excitedly laps up the mixture and PURRS.

HERBALIST (CONT’D)
Plum blossom is her favorite.

AANG
(panicked)
What about my friends?

HERBALIST
Well, all they need is some frozen wood frogs. There’s plenty of them down in the valley swamp.

AANG
What am I supposed to do with frozen frogs?

HERBALIST
Why, suck on them, of course.

AANG
(disgusted)
Suck on them?

HERBALIST
The frog’s skin excretes a substance that’ll cure your friends. But make sure you get plenty. Once those little critters thaw out, they’re useless.

Aang looks at the old lady with a blank expression.

AANG
You’re insane, aren’t you?

HERBALIST
That’s right.
(beat)
Well, don’t stand there all day... go!

Aang rushes out of the greenhouse.

EXT. HERBALIST INSTITUTE - CONTINUOUS

Aang rushes out of the institute. Out of nowhere, he’s barraged by dozens of arrows. Aang uses Airbending to knock the arrows away. (Think “Hero.”)

Aang looks up in the trees and sees dozens of the tattooed Yuyan Archers surrounding him. He timidly holds up an arrow.

AANG
(nervous)
Uh... I think you dropped this.

The archers reload their bows and take aim...

Off Aang’s scared reaction...

FADE OUT.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. HERBALIST INSTITUTE - SUNSET

The archers fire another volley of arrows from the trees. Aang kicks up a wall of Airbending, diverting the arrows off-course and into the surrounding tree trunks.

Archers jump down from the trees, blocking the path down the mountain. So Aang runs the opposite direction and jumps off the side of the cliff!

EXT. CLIFFSIDE TREES - CONTINUOUS

Aang descends straight down through the trees, getting knocked around the whole time. He grabs onto a branch which bends with his weight. He releases his grip and grabs onto another branch.

The archers pursue Aang. They jump of the cliff and throw ropes which loop/hook over the tree branches allowing them to swing down to the tree below. They repeat this action as they make their way down the cliffside in a zig-zag pattern.

Aang continues using the branches to slow his fall through the trees as he descends into...

EXT. VALLEY SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

Aang runs out of the trees into the swamp area, his clothes now ripped and torn. The edges of the shallow water have a thin layer of ice. Aang runs into the frigid waters, plunges his hands into the mud and digs around. Aang pulls a frozen frog out of the water and holds it up.

AANG
A Frog!

Suddenly, an arrow hits the frozen frog, knocking it back in the water.

Aang looks up to see the archers making their way down the cliff. A couple archers fire arrows as they dangle from the ropes. Aang deftly dodges the arrows. As the archers make their way to the bottom of the cliff, Aang runs through the waist-high water, pulling frogs from the mud and stuffing them in his shirt.

FWAP! An arrow goes through Aang’s sleeve and pins his shirt to a log. Aang pulls the arrow out and faces his assailants.

The archers fire again, and Aang uses Waterbending to draw up some swamp water in front of him and freeze it. The arrows bounce off the ice wall and fall into the swamp.

But just as quickly, another group of archers approach from the side and fires a precision attack in unison. The arrows pierce Aang's right sleeve and pin it to the log.

Aang goes to do another Waterbending move, but a second volley of arrows pins his left sleeve to the log. Aang tries to free his arms, but he's completely stuck. (NOTE: Aang is still in the water up to his waist.) Finally, a weighted net falls over him.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. FIRE NATION STRONGHOLD - PRISON CHAMBER - AT THE SAME TIME

CLOSE ON: Aang's terrified face. The camera pulls back to reveal that Aang is chained up. The camera continues pulling back, through the door, the hall, and out of the tower...

EXT. FIRE NATION STRONGHOLD - CONTINUOUS

The camera continues its LONG TRACKING SHOT. It swoops over the three tall walls as we see glimpses of the numerous soldiers, battlements, and large-scale weapons that protect the stronghold. We end on a wide shot, overlooking the entire fortress.

INT. FIRE NATION STRONGHOLD - PRISON CHAMBER - LATER

Aang struggles against the chains that bind him, but he can't move. The door to the cell opens, and Admiral Zhao strides in triumphantly. He looks Aang up and down.

ADMIRAL ZHAO
So this is the great Avatar. Master of all the elements. I don't know how you've managed to elude the Fire Nation for a hundred years, but your little game of hide-and-seek is over.

AANG
(putting on a brave face)
I've never hidden from you. Untie me and I'll fight you right now!

ADMIRAL ZHAO
(pretending to consider it)
Mmm... no.

Zhao gets in Aang's face.

ADMIRAL ZHAO (CONT'D)
Tell me, how does it feel to be the only Airbender left? Do you miss your people?

Aang loses his confidence and looks scared.

ADMIRAL ZHAO (CONT'D)
Oh, don't worry. You won't be killed like they were. See, if you die, you'll just be reborn and the Fire Nation will have to begin its search for the Avatar all over again. So I'll keep you alive.

Aang looks relieved.

ADMIRAL ZHAO (CONT'D)
But just barely.

Aang gets angry. He takes a deep breath and BLOWS a HUGE GUST OF WIND at Zhao, knocking him back against the wall and completely messing up his hair. Zhao tries to regain his composure.

ADMIRAL ZHAO (CONT'D)
Blow all the wind you want. Your situation is futile. There is no escaping this fortress.
(beat, leaning in)
And no one is coming to rescue you.

Zhao exits, slamming the door behind him.

EXT. ABANDONED CITY RUINS - DUSK

Katara and Sokka are still cuddled in Appa's arms.

SOKKA
(COUGHS) Water...

KATARA
Momo should be back any minute.

On cue, Momo runs up to the kids. But instead of water, he brings Katara a meadow vole that he killed. Momo drops the vole in front of Katara, very proud of his catch.

KATARA (CONT'D)
No Momo, water.
(making a drinking motion)
Wa-ter.

Momo CHITTERS in understanding and runs off again. Katara looks off toward the mountain where Aang went.

KATARA (CONT'D)
Aang, what in the world is taking you so long?

INT. FIRE NATION STRONGHOLD - PRISON CHAMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

Aang looks down, sadly. He is helpless.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. WOODS - IN SIGHT OF THE STRONGHOLD - NIGHT

Peering out from the trees is the same mysterious masked figure who was spying on Zhao. The Red Spirit crouches, completely motionless in the woods, watching the stronghold from behind the mask's hollow eyes. Then, he steps back, disappearing into the shadows.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE GATES OF STRONGHOLD — NIGHT

A supply caravan ambles slowly down a dirt path towards the main gates of the stronghold. As a cart passes over a patch of straw on the ground, arms shoot up from the straw and grab onto the bottom of the cart. The Red Spirit quickly pulls himself onto the bottom of the cart, unnoticed.

The caravan reaches the outside of the gate. Several sentries with bright torches search the vehicles thoroughly.

SENTRY
(checking carts)
All clear!... All clear!

The sentry comes to the cart under which the Red Spirit is hiding. In a tense moment, a sentry looks under the cart... but the Red Spirit is not there!

SENTRY (CONT'D)
All clear. Go on in.

As the cart heads into the stronghold, reveal that the Red Spirit has slipped undetected into the payload bay of the cart.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STRONGHOLD — INNER WALL — CONTINUOUS

Soldiers unload the supply carts, stacking the crates against the inner wall. The Red Spirit slips out of a crate and darts off into the shadows. He sneaks up a guard tower and onto the top of the inner wall.

We hear the hair-raising chants of an army below. The Red Spirit peeks over the wall and sees a courtyard before the keep, full of hundreds of soldiers. Perched above them on a balcony, Admiral Zhao delivers a harrowing speech.

ADMIRAL ZHAO
(full-throated)
We are the sons and daughters of fire, the superior element. Until today, only one thing stood in our path to victory: the Avatar. I am here to tell you that he is now my prisoner!

The crowd of soldiers chants back in unison, clanging their weapons.

CROWD
(THREE SCARY CHANTS)

ADMIRAL ZHAO
This is the year Sozin's comet returns to grant us its power!

CROWD
(ONE LOUD CHANT)

ADMIRAL ZHAO
This is the year the Fire Nation breaks through the walls of Ba Sing Se and burns the city to the ground!

CROWD
(FOUR LOUD CHANTS)

The guards atop the wall face the keep and chant as well, allowing the Red Spirit to sneak around to the back of the keep. He rappels down the wall (leaving a rope behind) and makes a dash to the keep, where he removes a loose grate and slips into a drain. The camera PANS UP the side of the keep.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON CHAMBER (INSIDE KEEP) – CONTINUOUS

Aang is still alone in the room, chained as before. Despite the futility of the situation, he struggles against the chains. His frustration grows until he is exhausted, having worked up a sweat. He hangs his head.

AANG
(EXHAUSTED, PANTING SOUNDS)

Suddenly, Aang's sash begins squirming! Aang snaps back to attention as several half-thawed frogs clumsily wriggle their way out of his shirt.

AANG (CONT'D)
What...? No, don't leave, frogs! My friends are sick and they need you! Please go back to being frozen!

The oblivious frogs fall to the floor and begin their own feeble escape on whatever unfrozen limbs they have available. With renewed desperation, Aang struggles against his chains.

INT. HALLWAY AND DOOR OUTSIDE OF PRISON CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

Four formidable Firebenders guard the prison door (they wear Firebender armor but have helmets that expose their faces, unlike the masked helmets of the normal Firebenders.) Their military composure changes to one of confusion upon hearing the strange, pathetic CROAKS of frogs. They look all around the hallway, until they discover a few of the thawing frogs squeezing themselves through the crack under the prison door.

Suddenly, a loud CLANKING sound draws their attention. They turn to see an empty Firebender helmet bouncing down the hall, right to their feet. One guard heads down the hall to investigate.

The guard rounds the corner. From the other guards' P.O.V. they see brief flashes of fire and hear the SOUNDS OF A QUICK STRUGGLE and then – silence.

Two more guards leave their post and approach the turn in the hallway cautiously. As they round the corner, they see the previous guard (alive, don't worry) hanging from the ceiling by a cinched chain around his wrists. His toes dangle above the floor and his mouth is gagged.

Before the other guards can even react, looped chains drop from the ceiling around one guard's wrists. In a blur, The Red Spirit jumps down from the ceiling, simultaneously yanking the other guard up by a chain around his ankle that he had unwittingly stepped into.

Back at the prison door, the last guard looks more than a little rattled as the MUFFLED SOUNDS OF THE STRUGGLE die down to silence again. He raises a SIGNAL HORN to his lips but in a WHOOSH a dagger flies down the hall and knocks it out of his hands. The guard turns in shock to see the haunting specter of the Red Spirit stepping around the corner (NOTE: his shoulders are turned slightly, obscuring something that he holds in one hand.)

The guard charges with a blaze of Firebending. The Red Spirit also charges, undaunted, and throws a bucket full of water at the oncoming attack. The fire is doused and the guard is soaked (and some frogs are washed down the hallway!) This buys the Red Spirit a few moments. He deftly swings the bucket, knocking the guard's legs out from under him. Before the guard hits the ground, we CUT TO:

INT. PRISON CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

Aang still struggles against his chains when a loud THUD reverberates from outside of the door. He stops and strains to hear more.

INT. DOOR OUTSIDE OF PRISON CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

The Red Spirit stands over the final guard, binding the guard's hands and feet inside the bucket, mouth gagged. The Red Spirit removes his dagger from the signal horn and turns to the prison door.

INT. PRISON CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

Silence. Then the metal door RATTLES suddenly. Aang is startled. The Red Spirit slips inside, closing the door behind him.

AANG
(FRIGHTENED GASP)

The Red Spirit stares at him from behind the frightening mask for a long beat. Aang looks back with a mixture of worry and fear. Suddenly, the Red Spirit draws two broadswords in a menacing fashion. He strikes a fighting stance, like a tiger about to pounce, then leaps directly towards Aang, swords flashing through the air!

AANG (CONT'D)
(TERRIFIED SCREAM)

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. PRISON CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

The Red Spirit's swords cut through the air as Aang SCREAMS for his life. We hear the CLASH of metal reverberating in the room.

Aang opens his eyes -– the Red Spirit has cut the chains! Aang is in shock. The Red Spirit JIMMIES Aang's shackles open, then rushes back to the door and listens intently.

AANG
Who are you? What's going on?

The masked figure ignores him and remains silent.

AANG (CONT'D)
Are you here to rescue me?

The Red Spirit opens the door, signals Aang to follow him, and slips out.

AANG (CONT'D)
I'll take that as a "yes."

INT. DOOR OUTSIDE OF PRISON CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

Aang steps out into the hall and sees the bound Firebender.

The Red Spirit is already down the hall peeking around the corner. Aang starts to follow, but hears a CROAK in the opposite direction.

AANG
(remembering)
(GASPS) My frogs! Come back! And stop thawing out!

He tries to collect them as they jump and wriggle away, but the Red Spirit grabs him and drags him off screen.

AANG (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Wait! My friends need to suck on those frogs!

EXT. ABANDONED CITY RUINS – NIGHT

Katara and Sokka are huddled in blankets in Appa's arms. A pile of junk is next to them which includes old scrolls, plates, lanterns, candlesticks, etc.

Momo comes back once again, this time with an old CROWN that he places on top of the pile.

KATARA
(weakly)
How many times do I have to tell you, Momo... we need water.
(slow and emphatic)
Wah-ter.

Momo CHIRRUPS.

KATARA (CONT'D)
Oh, forget it.
(then)
Aang, please, hurry.

SOKKA
(weakly)
Who's this Aang kid you keep talking about, your highness?

We REVEAL Katara now has the crown on her head.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE KEEP — A FEW MINUTES LATER

The Red Spirit emerges from the drain, followed by Aang. They sneak from the back of the keep to the side, and hide at the edge of the shadows. Dozens of soldiers mill about, post-rally. Aang is frightened and even the Red Spirit seems hesitant.

INT. HALLWAY OF KEEP — CONTINUOUS

Zhao walks down the hall and gives orders to his assistant.

ADMIRAL ZHAO
I want a full transcription of my speech sent to the Fire Lord, along with glowing testimonials from all of the ranking officers present and--

Zhao stops dead in his tracks when he sees the three tethered Firebenders hanging in various awkward ways from the ceiling. They utter MUFFLED YELLS as Zhao stares in disbelief.

INT. PRISON CHAMBER — A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Zhao whips the door open to nothing but an empty room. Well, not exactly empty: a single, pathetic, half-thawed frog looks up at Zhao.

FROG
(RIBBIT)

You've never seen Zhao this angry. He storms off as his assistant calls after him.

ZHAO'S ASSISTANT
Sir, should I hold off on sending that speech to the Fire Lord...?

EXT. BASE OF INNER WALL — A FEW MOMENTS LATER

The Red Spirit and Aang make their way to the bottom of the rope (left behind from the earlier rappelling scene.) Just as they are about to commence climbing, an ALARM SOUNDS. They freeze.

Searchlights begin to scan all of the grounds and inner walls. Aang and the Red Spirit resume climbing, frantically, but guards atop the inner wall spot them and yell to the troops on the ground.

GUARD
There! On the wall!

THE CHASE IS ON!

Another guard cuts the rope, and Aang and the Red Spirit drop back down to the courtyard. The Red Spirit draws his swords and points to the gate on the other side of the courtyard, which is ajar.

Zhao calls out from the balcony.

ADMIRAL ZHAO
The Avatar has escaped! Close all the gates immediately!

The Red Spirit and Aang make a run for the open gate, but dozens of spearsmen block their path, readying their weapons.

AANG
(to the blue Spirit, running by his side)
Stay close to me!

They near the line of spearsmen and Aang launches an air assault that blasts half of them out of the way. They rush through the newly formed alley, but Aang is faster than the Red Spirit. The soldiers close in around the masked swordsman, and a melee ensues.

Aang almost makes it to the gate (which is closing), but he glances back and sees the Red Spirit surrounded and fighting for his life. Aang stops and picks up one of the soldier's spears and breaks off the knife end, leaving a blade-free staff similar to his own (sticking to his monk's code.) He rushes back to his liberator's aid.

Spearsmen attack the Red Spirit from every direction, but his double broadswords flash with mastery, cutting spears in half left and right.

Aang deals out powerful gusts of Airbending with every swing of the staff, peeling soldiers off of the melee. He tries to break through to the Red Spirit at the center, but soldiers attack Aang from all sides.

Just as the Red Spirit is about to become a pincushion, Aang leaps over the soldiers' heads and lands on the shafts of their spears, pushing the tips down to the ground. The Red Spirit runs up the makeshift spear-ramp and leaps over their heads and out of the circle. Aang rolls down the ramp to the center of the spearsmen. He spins his staff 360 degrees and flattens all of them. Aang takes off running and catches up to the Red Spirit, but THE GATE CLOSES!

The masked swordsman whips around, back to the wall and readies his swords to resume the fight. But Aang grabs him by the wrists and performs an Airbending butterfly kick/throw, launching him ALL THE WAY UP TO THE TOP OF THE INNER WALL! (Only the first of THREE walls that they must get over to escape.) Aang grabs the staff and helicopters his way up to the top.

Zhao rushes out of the keep and into the courtyard just in time to see this.

EXT. ATOP INNER WALL — CONTINUOUS

Aang lands on top of the wall and tries to catch his breath. The Red Spirit is already fencing with two swordsmen, one on each side. Aang recovers and resumes his helicopter. He plucks the Red Spirit off of the wall with his legs (a la the end of the pilot,) leaving the swordsmen clashing each other's blades in confusion.

EXT. ABOVE THE MIDDLE COURTYARD/ATOP THE MIDDLE WALL — CONTINUOUS

Aang helicopters them across the distance between the two walls. He twirls the staff with all his strength, but the weight of the Red Spirit exhausts him. Below, soldiers launch their spears like javelins at the pair, but the Red Spirit knocks them away with his swords and crescent kicks.

They begin losing altitude as Aang struggles with all his might. They crash-land on top of the MIDDLE WALL and the staff skitters away. The Red Spirit recovers and looks in both directions along the wall, seeing a few soldiers closing in on either side of them. Aang, exhausted, makes a move for the staff but a soldier gets to it first and kicks it over the side of the wall.

The soldier rushes to strike Aang, but THE RED SPIRIT SAVES HIS HIDE, THROWING THE SOLDIER OVER THE WALL! As the soldier crashes into a supply crate below, we see other soldiers rushing the base of the wall, holding onto bamboo ladders parallel to the ground. The ladder-bearers in the front run UP THE WALLS as the men in the back push them higher with the flexible ladders (see the Korean film “Musa, The Warrior” for reference. Trust me, it is cool.)

Three ladder-bearers reach the top of the middle wall. The Red Spirit kicks them back off the wall one by one (they crash, roughly but safely, into crates below as well.) But other soldiers on the wall are still closing in! Aang peers over the wall and sees the men from below climbing up the ladders. He holds onto a ladder with one hand and blasts the men off of it with Airbending from his other hand. Aang pulls the ladder up quickly and hands it to the Red Spirit.

AANG
Take this!

The Red Spirit sheaths his swords and grabs the ladder. Aang repeats the action, stripping more soldiers from the second ladder and pulling it up into his own hands.

AANG (CONT’D)
Jump on my back!

Aang puts one foot on the last ladder and pushes off the wall with his other. The Red Spirit leaps onto his back, pushing them out even faster, just as the soldiers atop the wall close in.

EXT. OUTERMOST COURTYARD — CONTINUOUS

The ladder, full of climbing men, tips away from the middle wall and falls toward the outer wall. Aang and a piggybacking Red Spirit teeter on the top, holding a spare ladder each. As the ladder tips farther and faster, Aang plants his ladder in the ground and they jump over to that one, sort of pole-vaulting across the yard. The first ladder and all of its men crash to the ground.

AANG
Gimme the next one!

The Red Spirit complies. At the critical moment, Aang plants that one too. They begin their third arc over the yard, nearing the outer wall. It looks like they might make it! But the ladder is too far away! In a desperate burst of energy, Aang jumps with the Red Spirit on his back for the top of the outer wall — BUT THEY CRASH INTO THE SIDE OF THE OUTER WALL! Aang claws at the wall but they fall backwards and plummet to the ground, at the base of the last gate.

Firebenders surround Aang and the Red Spirit. The Red Spirit draws his swords. The Firebenders launch a volley of fire at the pair. With the last of his strength, Aang shoves his way in front of The Red Spirit and creates a shield of wind that protects the both of them, just in the nick of time.

Admiral Zhao and General Shinu arrive on the scene.

ADMIRAL ZHAO
Hold your fire! The Avatar must be captured alive!

CLOSE ON: the Red Spirit’s mask for a beat. He rushes forward.

SNAP OUT to reveal that the Red Spirit holds both of his swords to Aang’s throat, in a scissor fashion. He stands behind Aang and uses the boy’s body for a shield.

Aang is in complete shock, and scared. The Firebenders part as Zhao steps forward. There is a VERY tense stand off. Zhao soaks in the “face” of this thief for a long beat.

ADMIRAL ZHAO (CONT’D)
Open the gate.

COLONEL SHINU
(surprised)
Admiral, what are you doing?

ADMIRAL ZHAO
(forcefully)
Let them out. Now.

The gates begin to open and The Red Spirit quickly backs out of the fort, holding Aang as his insurance.

COLONEL SHINU
How could you let them go?

ADMIRAL ZHAO
A situation like this requires... precision.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO STRONGHOLD GATE — A FEW MOMENTS LATER

The Red Spirit retreats cautiously, still hiding behind Aang with the swords at his throat. They are a few hundred feet from the gate now. Aang is wide-eyed with fear. The desperate Red Spirit pants behind his mask. They are almost to the outlying woods...

EXT. ATOP THE OUTER WALL — CONTINUOUS

Zhao watches Aang and the Red Spirit back away from atop the wall.

ADMIRAL ZHAO
(calmly)
Do you have a clear shot?

CLOSE ON: an arrow being notched on a string.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP ON: an arrowhead... RACK FOCUS TO: a tattooed face sighting down the shaft of the arrow. The elite archer nods affirmatively.

ADMIRAL ZHAO (CONT'D)
Knock out the thief. I'll deliver him to the Fire Lord along with the Avatar.

The archer lets the arrow fly! In the COOLEST 2D/3D shot, the camera flies as the arrow's P.O.V. from the top of the wall all the way to...

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO STRONGHOLD GATE – CONTINUOUS

...the center of the Red Spirit's forehead! The arrow strikes the metal mask and the Red Spirit falls to the ground, freeing Aang's neck in the process.

Aang looks back at him in shock and sees the mysterious man is knocked unconscious. Aang sees the mask has been knocked loose and a bit of the face below is exposed. Aang quickly Airbends at the ground, kicking up a thick dust screen between the stronghold and himself.

EXT. ATOP THE OUTER WALL – CONTINUOUS

Zhao sees this and orders the soldiers:

ADMIRAL ZHAO
Quick, recover the Avatar!

Soldiers pour out of the gate towards the dust cloud down the road.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO STRONGHOLD GATE – CONTINUOUS

Inside the dust, Aang kneels before the unconscious figure and removes the Red Spirit's mask revealing...

IT'S ZUKO!

Aang scrambles back in utter shock and disbelief. Aang hears the pounding sound of the approaching soldiers as they near. Fear washes over his face and he gets to his feet and begins to run... but Aang stops. He looks back at Zuko's defenseless body... and then up to the soldier's silhouettes behind the dust. He wrestles with the decision for a beat...

The soldiers arrive on the scene just as the dust clears – Aang and the Red Spirit/Zuko are gone.

EXT. ATOP THE OUTER WALL – CONTINUOUS

Zhao looks down at his empty-handed soldiers and his failed plan. He grits his teeth, seething. A pathetic little CROAK sounds nearby. Zhao looks down, irritated, as a fully thawed frog inches towards the edge of the wall and against all odds, leaps off to its freedom.

EXT. SOMEWHERE DEEP IN THE WOODS – DAWN BREAKING

BLACK.

FADE UP ON: an out of focus shot from the ground looking straight up at the sky through a canopy of trees. The camera slowly rolls to the side as a blurry image of Aang comes into frame.

CUT TO: Zuko, regaining consciousness. (The previous was his P.O.V.) He is groggy and lying on the ground next to his mask and scabbard with a makeshift pillow of leaves below his head. A scuffed up and filthy Aang sits a few feet away, watching over him.

Upon seeing Aang, Zuko tries to raise with a start, but his aching head forces him back down. As he recovers, Aang begins to speak. Zuko remains silent.

AANG
(reminiscing)
You know what the worst part about being born over a hundred years ago is? I miss all the friends I use to hang out with. Before the war started, I use to always visit my friend Kuzon. The two of us, we'd get in and out of so much trouble together. He was one of the best friends I ever had. And he was from the Fire Nation, just like you.

Zuko just listens, staring at Aang.

AANG (CONT'D)
If we knew each other back then, do you think we could have been friends too?

Zuko answers by punching fire at Aang, trying to get the drop on him. By the time Zuko makes it to his feet, the Avatar is long gone, springing from tree branch to tree branch. The battered prince stares after him as he disappears, and we see that something (the first sign of compassion?) registers deep inside of him.

EXT. SWAMP – EARLY MORNING

(A SINGLE WOODWIND INSTRUMENT PLAYS A MELLOW TUNE.)

Amongst dozens of spent arrows, Aang's tattooed hands root around in muddy swamp water and pull up some frozen frogs.

EXT. ZUKO'S SHIP, ANCHORED NEAR SHORE — LATER THAT MORNING

Zuko' skiff is loaded back onto his anchored ship while the woodwind instrument continues.

On deck, An exhausted and grumpy-looking Zuko passes Uncle Iroh playing the tsungi horn (the one he purchased in Ep. 109. It is the source of the music in this and the previous scene.) Uncle stops playing.

UNCLE IROH
(friendly)
Where have you been, Prince Zuko? You missed music night! Lieutenant Jee sang a stirring love song...

Zuko trudges by, rubbing his forehead.

ZUKO
(groggy)
I'm going to bed. No disturbances.

Uncle looks after him, perplexed, then returns to playing the horn.

INT. ABANDONED RUINS — EVEN LATER THAT MORNING

Aang drags his feet. His clothes are in tatters and it looks like he hasn't slept in a week. Katara (still wearing her crown) and Sokka look pallid and feverish in their sleep. Momo is passed out on top of the pile of junk, no drink of water in sight.

Aang delicately wakes the kids and sticks frozen frogs in their mouths. The kids are too weak to protest.

AANG
Suck on these. They'll make you feel better.

Aang collapses against Appa's soft, mattress-like tail.

SOKKA
(delirious and mouth full of frog)
Aang! How was your trip? Did you make any new friends?

AANG
(muttering, just about to fall asleep)
No, I don’t think I did...

INT. ZUKO’S BEDROOM – SAME TIME

Zuko lies in bed and stares at the ceiling. He is deep in thought for a long beat, then looks at the large Fire Nation flag hanging on his wall. He SIGHS, rolls away from the flag, and goes to sleep.

INT. ABANDONED RUINS – SAME TIME

As Aang sleeps, the siblings dutifully suck on their medicine for a long beat.

SOKKA
(mouth still full of frog)
Mmm, this is tasty...

As the frogs thaw out, they wriggle to life and jump from their mouths. Katara and Sokka are horrified.

KATARA/SOKKA
(REVULSION, SPITTING AND COUGHING SOUNDS)

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW